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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [OIIP](#) [OPRC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PK](#)
SUBJECT: PAKISTAN MEDIA REACTION: APRIL 27, 2009

Summary: Reports on the launch of a military operation in Lower Dir district (NWFP) killing "26 militants and two FC personnel" dominated headlines in all newspapers on Monday. President Zardari's remarks made during an interview with the state-run PTV that "let's go beyond 'do more' mantra, as it was time to get together and strengthen each other to be able to achieve more" received prominent display. Newspapers highlighted Secretary of State Clinton's statement that "U.S. has 'concern' over safety of Pakistan nukes." Several major dailies also ran a Sunday Times story that the "U.S. threatened to attack Swat Taliban if Pakistan failed to act."

Most major Urdu language dailies ran in-depth editorials on the growing threat of 'Talibanization,' whereas the English language newspapers editorialized a host of other subjects. Commenting on the western media reports on threats to Pakistan's survival, the mass circulation Urdu daily, "Jang," noted that "we cannot shrug off their criticism by merely saying that these are conspiracies of our enemies, as ground realities support their analyses." In contrast, the pro-Taliban Jihadi Urdu daily, "Islam," observed that the "U.S. and its covert lobbies here in Pakistan are exaggerating the threat of the Pakistani Taliban and their plans." The Lahore-based liberal daily, "Daily Times," opined that "we know that we have the army strong in numbers and strength to take care of the Taliban, but we first must convince it that the threat from India is only relative while that of the Taliban is absolute." End Summary.

News Stories

"Major Offensive Launched In Lower Dir; 26 Militants, Two FC Men Killed" "The News" (04/27)

"The security forces killed 26 militants in a military operation launched on Sunday morning in the Maidan area of Lower Dir district. Two personnel of the paramilitary Frontier Corps (FC) were also killed and a major was among the four injured in an ambush in Maidan, the native area of the banned Tehrik Nifaz Shariat-e-Muhammadi Chief Maulana Sufi Muhammad, the sources said."

"Forces Take On Militants In Lower Dir" "Dawn" (04/27)

"Security forces launched an operation against militants in Lower Dir on Sunday and there were reports of fierce clashes from different parts of the district. The ISPR claimed that several militants, among them a 'commander,' had been killed in clashes in the Kala Daag area. It said the operation had been launched at the

request of the NWFP government and local tribal elders."

"Taliban Asked To Lay Down Arms" "Dawn" (04/27)

"The government announced on Sunday that the Swat peace deal would not be affected by the operation launched by the Frontier Corps in cooperation with the army in Lower Dir. 'The operation has nothing to do with Swat. It is being launched in Dir area against increasing militancy there,' Interior Secretary Kamal Shah said.... However, he hinted that if militants did not lay down arms after the enforcement of 'Sharia laws' in Swat, the security operation could be extended to other areas, including the valley. On the other hand, the banned Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan's spokesman Muslim Khan said Taliban would not lay down weapons unless all Americans in Pakistan returned to their country and Darul Qaza was established in Swat."

"Time To 'Achieve More,' Zardari Tells U.S." "The Nation" (04/27)

"President Asif Ali Zardari in a clear reference to repeated assertions of 'do more' by the West and the United States, has said it was time to get together and strengthen each other to be able to achieve more, do more is not the answer. Achievement is the answer, President Asif Ali Zardari told the state-run PTV during an interview telecast on Sunday night."

"Government Will Review Stance If Swat People Reject Deal" "Daily Times" (04/27)

"The government will review its stance on the peace deal and Nizam-e-Adl Regulation in Swat if the people of the valley think it did not bring peace, President Asif Ali Zardari said in an interview with the state-run Pakistan Television on Sunday."

"U.S. Has 'Concerns' Over Safety Of Pak Nukes: Hillary" "The News" (04/27)

"Pakistan's nuclear arsenal is currently safe, but Washington has 'concerns' over what could happen if the advancing Taliban topples the government, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in an interview with Fox News on Saturday."

"Taliban Takeover A Possibility, Says U.S." "Dawn" (04/27)

"If the Taliban take over Islamabad, they will have the keys to Pakistan's nuclear arsenal, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said on Saturday, underlining the fear that plays a pivotal role in determining America's attitude towards the country. And recent statements by other U.S. officials indicate that America sees a Taliban takeover as a real possibility and not just a distant threat."

"Taliban Threat To Islamabad Rubbish: ISPR" "The News" (04/27)

"Director General Inter-Services Public relations (ISPR) Maj. Gen. Athar Abbas has outrightly rejected the (baseless) fears that Taliban could storm Islamabad. Talking to CNN, he said it is impossible for a band of only 200 Taliban, who had come to Buner, to storm the capital also."

"U.S. Threatened To Attack Swat Taliban If Pakistan Failed To Act." "Daily Times" (04/27)

"The United States made it clear last week that it would attack the Taliban in Swat valley unless the Pakistani government stopped their advance. A senior Pakistani official told 'The Times' newspaper, the American government intervened after Taliban moved in Buner.... 'The implicit threat - if you don't do it, we may have to - was always there,' said the official."

"Munawar Announces Launching Of Anti-U.S. Movement" "The News" (04/27)

"Amir Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Syed Munawar Hasan on Sunday announced to launch a countrywide 'Go America Go' movement. 'The movement starting immediately will continue till achieving its objective,' Munawar Hasan said while addressing a training program of JI at Wah Cantt."

"Govt. Urged Not To Deploy Troops In Buner" "Dawn" (04/27)

"Local chapters of the country's major political and religious parties have opposed the deployment of troops in Buner.... They proposed that a joint council comprising representatives of the political and religious parties, Taliban and the administration be formed to resolve all disputes."

"Army-Men Deployed To Secure Hazara From Militants" "The News" (04/27)

"Security forces in Hazara insist that adequate measures have been taken to stop the spillover of militants from the nearby Malakand Division, a source disclosed on Sunday. Several hundred army-men, the source disclosed, have been deployed in Thakot area since Friday to block the route, linking Malakand with Hazara and the Northern Areas."

"Taliban Moving Towards Kalam" "The News" (04/27)

"The conflict-weary people of Swat are seeing the activities of the security forces and militants as prelude to the resumption of military operation in the valley as militants established check-posts in Bahrain and were reported to be advancing towards the scenic Kalam valley, while the forces have set up their check-post in Khwazakhela."

"TTP Assembling Taliban In Mardan: Residents" "Daily Times" (04/27)

"Mardan - the native district of NWFP Chief Minister Ameer Haider Hoti - could be the next region to fall to the Taliban, as the group has stepped up attacks in the district and started assembling local Taliban in the area, said residents on Sunday."

"Billboards Featuring Women Reappear In Peshawar" "Daily Times" (04/27)

"Despite Taliban threats for women to not appear on billboards, multinational companies have begun replacing men's photos on advertising billboards in the provincial metropolis with those of women."

"Geologist's Body Handed Over To Polish Envoy" "Dawn" (04/27)

"The body of a Polish geologist, who was kidnapped in September last year and beheaded by the Taliban on February 7, was handed over to the Polish ambassador here on Sunday. The body of the 42-year-old Piotr (Peter) Stanczak had earlier been handed over to the administration in North Waziristan by some unidentified people."

"NATO-Pakistan Naval Exercises Off Karachi From Today" "Dawn" (04/27)

"NATO will begin two days of joint naval exercises with Pakistan on Monday as part of an effort to enhance cooperation in counter-terrorism and anti-piracy measures. Five NATO vessels, carrying about 800 crew in total, will take part along with four ships and air units from the Pakistan navy."

Editorials/Op-eds

"Swat Peace Deal - Government Must Not Delay All-Inclusive Consultation," an editorial in the leading mass circulation centrist Urdu daily "Jang" (cir. 300,000) (04/27)

"Pakistan's image is badly damaged in the world owing to the situation of FATA, Swat, and different areas of the NWFP and Balochistan. The western media is portraying Pakistan as a failed state, and that Pakistani people don't deserve a democratic dispensation. We cannot shrug off their criticism by merely saying that these are conspiracies of our enemies, as ground realities support their analyses."

"Negotiations Only Option," an editorial in the Karachi-based, pro Taliban Jihadi Urdu daily "Islam" (cir. 15,000) (04/27)

"It is a reality that the U.S. and its covert lobbies in Pakistan are exaggerating the threat of Pakistani Taliban and their plans to achieve their nefarious designs, otherwise the ground realities negate these half truths. The state of affairs necessitates an immediate reconciliation between the government and the tribesmen. The government should ensure peace by initiating dialogue in insurgency-hit areas of Malakand, North and South Waziristan and Balochistan."

"After The End Of Swat Peace Deal," an editorial in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (04/27)

"We become furious when Americans and Europeans tell us we are under no threat from India. We give them circumstantial proofs - proofs which have not yet been made public in Pakistan - but that doesn't convince them of the threat because India does the same about our 'hand' in their country. The threat of the Taliban and Al Qaeda is more palpable to them because it has an extra-regional dimension. The 'deal' in Swat on the other hand has made us come alive to the internal threat because the Taliban there have been forced to clearly express their view of the state of Pakistan. At this juncture we know that we have the army strong in numbers and strength to take care of the Taliban, but we first must convince it that the threat from India is only relative while that of the Taliban is absolute."

"National Dialogue Is Essential," an editorial in the Peshawar-based Urdu-language daily "Mashriq" (cir. 55,000) (04/27)

"At last U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has confessed that the U.S. is to blame for the present mess in Pakistan, as it (U.S.) abandoned Pakistan following collapse of the Soviet Union. Secretary Clinton's affirmation is not the whole truth. No doubt that the U.S. achieved its objective of breakdown of Soviet Union, but it (U.S.) has been engaged to seek its aims in Afghanistan hitherto. And the presence of the U.S. troops in Afghanistan is to achieve those targets."

"TTP's Self-Assertion," an editorial in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (04/27)

"Sufi Muhammad's apparent helplessness to persuade the TTP to abide by the agreement could reflect, according to some analysts, his complicity since they believe that the TNSM is one with the TTP in the mission to spread their brand of Islam outside the confines of the valley into Pakistan and beyond.... In the wider interests of the nation already facing multiple crises, both sides should do their best to avoid the situation getting out of hand. That is only possible if all parties involved were to strictly adhere to the agreement."

"Root Cause Of Militancy," an editorial in the Islamabad-based rightist English daily "Pakistan Observer" (cir. 5,000) (04/27)

"It is ironical that the United States and its cohorts have successfully diverted attention of the international community from the real and root cause of terrorism and extremism in the region through intense propaganda campaign. They are now trying to convince the world that the problems lay in the tribal region on Pakistan-Afghanistan border and therefore, there is need to focus attention on this area. Irrespective of these diversionary tactics, the fact remains that the root cause of terrorism and extremism in this part of the world is illegal occupation of Afghanistan by the United States, Britain and other contributing troops for consolidating this aggression.... Simple and honest solution of the problem is immediate and unconditional withdrawal of foreign occupation forces from Afghanistan."

"Consensus On A Decisive Operation In Tribal Areas," an editorial in the second-largest, center-right nationalist Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (cir. 150,000) (04/27)

"Militants have already signaled their resistance [to a military operation] by stopping a convoy in Mingora. Hence the unwise path of an operation must be avoided at all costs, and peace deals like the Swat deal must be promoted. Otherwise there will be no peace in the country, in fact Pakistan's security will be endangered - which

is America's greatest desire because then it would impose India's supremacy on Pakistan."

"Terrorism: International Community Must Cooperate With Pakistan," an editorial in Lahore-based populist Urdu daily "Waqt" (cir. 10,000) (04/27)

"There has been no terrorist attack in the U.S. after 9/11 but there have been almost daily terrorist attacks in Pakistan where innocent people have lost their lives. Pakistan faces more threat from terrorists than the U.S. Therefore, the U.S. and the international community must help Pakistan as much as possible in dealing with this problem. Instead of being impatient, the U.S. leadership must help Pakistan succeed in its efforts against terrorism."

"Militants And Possible Steps Of Operation," an editorial in liberal Urdu daily "Express" (cir. 25,000) (04/27)

"Despite the Swat peace deal, there has been no let up in terrorist activities. Review of just one day's newspapers is enough to give one an idea of how grave the situation is. It seems as if militants considered the government's desire for peace to be weakness, and went about demonstrating their strength without any fear.... The question is: why are the militants not disarming despite the peace deal?... The government should launch a full-fledged operation against the militants if despite all efforts, the militants do not give up."

"Children's Death Due To Toy Bomb," an editorial in the Lahore-based populist center-right Urdu daily "Khabrain" (cir. 50,000) (04/27)

"Eleven children were killed by a toy bomb they found outside a girls school in Lower Dir.... No religion of the world allows the killing of children, let alone a faith like Islam that preaches peace.... According to reports, the army has started an operation in Lower Dir. Activities by the militants necessitated this operation. It is imperative to crush elements involved in such activities. However, we feel that there is a need to exercise extreme caution so that civilian losses are minimized."

"And Now A Toy Bomb...!," an editorial in the Karachi-based right-wing pro-Jamaat-e-Islami Urdu daily "Jasarat" (cir. 3,000) (04/27)

"Bomb explosions have become a everyday happening in Pakistan. Senior U.S. officials also have expressed their apprehensions that Pakistan is in peril of survival. Some western media reports too revealed the presence of Israeli secret missions in Afghanistan that provide support to terrorist activities in the NWFP. And we believe that these deadly toy bombs are being provided to terrorists by these foreign elements. As pointed out by the Jamaat-i-Islami chief the 'Americanization' of Pakistan is the real problem and not the 'Talibanization.'"

"We Are Not A Failed State," an editorial in the second-largest, center-right nationalist Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (cir. 150,000) (04/27)

"Brookings scholar Bruce Reidel has said that it has become fashionable to say that Pakistan is a failed state, but the Pakistanis neither support break-up of their country nor do they want a Taliban state.... After reviewing the situation in the region, British and U.S. think tanks have come to realize that Pakistan is being pushed towards [being labeled] a failed state according to a conspiracy. In this scenario, it is our leaders' duty to immediately extricate themselves from a war of American interests."

"Pro-Delhi Camouflaged Taliban," an editorial in the Lahore-based independent Urdu daily "Din" (cir. 10,000) (04/27)

"According to a planned strategy, the Western media is misleading the international community by spreading disinformation about Taliban advances towards Shangla and Buner. The fact is that Afghan Tajik infiltrators, posing as Taliban, are destroying peace in the area. The fact is that U.S. troops and officials in Afghanistan, NATO and ISAF forces are the sponsors of these camouflaged Taliban. India has succeeded to a great extent in making these formerly

pro-Moscow Northern Alliance [members] pro-India. It is these pro-Delhi camouflaged Taliban that are looting trucks loaded with chemical fertilizers in Swat. There is a fear that these people might use this ammonium nitrate fertilizer to make bombs."

"This Too Shall Pass," an op-ed by Syed Mansoor Hussain in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (04/27)

"Ultimately what will defeat Talibanization in Pakistan is the fact that Muslims in Pakistan belong to many different schools of thought within Islam and will not subscribe to any one interpretation that is forced upon them.... What should worry us however is if the Taliban morph into a populist political movement.... It is an alliance of the poor and the underprivileged with the well-armed, well-trained and now politicized Taliban that could make things really difficult."

"Lessons From Buner," an op-ed by Zafar Hilaly in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (04/27)

"Sufi Mohammed's new found respect for the Pakistani constitution is a feeble attempt at dissimulation and yet another demonstration of the familiar Taliban tactic to blow hot and cold, to confuse the adversary, split his ranks while all the time consolidating the Taliban's hold on the public mind and emotions. This tactic worked in Afghanistan and Sufi Mohammed believes it will work in Pakistan.... The Taliban are aware that as in Afghanistan, so in Pakistan, they cannot succeed by force alone. If they ever prevail it will be because Pakistani society preferred what they had to offer by way of security, justice and opportunity to what a succession of disastrously inept, corrupt and dysfunctional regimes has visited on them over the past 60 years."

"Swat At The Mercy Of Militants," an op-ed by Anees Jillani in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (04/27)

"The people of these underdeveloped areas are depressed, and have lost all faith in law-enforcement agencies. The rulers and the ruling classes fail to realize that the masses must have a stake in the system and the country. If they are deprived of fundamental rights such as food, roads, electricity, jobs, education, healthcare, and security, what purpose does this system serve for them? Is it at all surprising then that, given their daily battles for survival, who rules Saidu Sharif, Peshawar or Islamabad is of very little consequence?"

"Fighting The Militant Within Us," an op-ed by Kamal Siddiqi in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (04/17)

"As Pakistanis we need to ask ourselves what we want with this war that has been imposed on us.... As Pakistanis, especially those who directly or indirectly favor the Taliban and argue that this group is not against Pakistan, we need to know what our rightwing lobby is trying to get us into.... The writ of the state is challenged time and again and we are left with empty assurances given by de facto Interior Minister Rehman Malik. The state is seen as weak. Despite the spending of billions on defence and law and order, the people feel more insecure than ever."

"On The Brink Of An Abyss," an op-ed by Aqab Malik in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (04/17)

"The fact that Pakistan is a nuclear-armed state does not go unnoticed by the outside world, neither does the situation in Swat, Buner and now Shangla. What is stopping the West from saying that enough is enough? The truth of the matter is that it fears that Pakistan's nuclear arsenal may wholly or partially fall into the hands of insurgents or those that sympathize with them.... There is an imminent threat and alarm bells have been set off around the world. Unfortunately, the government appears to be in a state of deep sleep even as a civil war begins to envelop us."

"Getting Started," an op-ed by Shahzad Chaudhry in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (04/17)

"As a nation, true to our ways, with all or most of our eggs in the U.S. basket, we are in a state of denial of the real-politik compulsion of the need to work with the Americans to realize our stated goals in this struggle against bigotry, antiquated thought and self-styled religious extremists. After having waited for the Americans to craft a smart policy to untangle Afghanistan and militancy issues, and having praised it no end, we have chosen to break away from it in official pronouncements at the level of the prime minister, while the president continues to identify with the shared goals and objectives of the revised policy."

Feierstein